

## Out of the Order of Things

*By Nancy Martz*

She had shut down. She made the bed, chased the clutter, fixed the meals, but she didn't laugh, she didn't cry, she didn't feel. She stayed home and kept communication with friends short and impersonal. She taught herself to be neutral, dispassionate. Numb was safe. Numb made sense. She had shut down.

But she performed at work as if nothing had happened. Her students didn't expect a personal relationship. They were college transients, there to learn, to pass the course, to collect the credits and move on, and so she could smile and laugh and dramatize the lessons she had prepared, cheerfully teasing them into thinking beyond their presumed limits. But she didn't have to bear the burden of what may happen to them some day: an accident, a fire, cancer, some numbing loss. Something too heart breaking. It was expedient to withhold the love that grows too deeply to endure, and with students who always move on, this was doable.

She was teaching a night class of Introduction to Logic and had written a minor premise and a conclusion on the board. She looked around for someone to supply the major premise, but eyes everywhere averted hers. She called on Rosie, who always had the right answers, but Rosie paled and looked down shaking her head. It was time for a break, anyway, so she told them to come back in twenty minutes. They all headed for the coffee lounge except Rosie. "Professor, I'm feeling ill, and I may need to leave class early."

"Oh," she responded, "Go home now; it's perfectly O.K. Don't worry; you have more A's than spaces in my grade book. Go home and get well."

"But he wants me to tell you something, Professor. I don't know him, but he is very insistent. It's really an exception to logic, and I am afraid to tell you."

"Oh, that sounds intriguing. Go ahead. I'm not that hard-nosed."

"O.K. But it's awkward telling you. Something was compelling me to look at an empty chair near the blackboard. When I looked away, I felt sick. Finally I gave in and the figure of a dark haired man appeared in the chair, pleading with me to tell you how proud he was of you, and that he never knew you as a teacher. That's when you called on me." Her student went on, supplying details, what he wore, his blue eyes, height, weight, and how he seemed to have broken capillaries on both cheeks, making his face look ruddy, though he was very light skinned otherwise.

The professor stared at her, saying nothing. But how could Rosie know any of this. It didn't fit the syllogism, yet a dark cloud lifted and she went home that night without the numbness. She knew the man was her beloved father who had died a year before in an Iowa ditch with the mower on top of him. The father she could not let go, even to death. It wasn't religion she got, and it wasn't logic. It was her father, there to bring her back to life.